Women's Programs

# Year in Review

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Agnes Macleod

**"Since British Columbia's earliest days, women have made a major contribution to the social, political and economic vitality of British Columbia. But while they have played a significant role in the development of our province, they continue to encounter barriers to achieving economic and social independence. In the past these barriers were addressed on an individual basis. Today, their solution demands a coordinated, concerted approach involving both governments and communities."**

*From Moving Forward: Initiatives for Women in B.C., a response to the Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women, January, 1991.*

# What We Do

Women throughout British Columbia are working hard to build a better and stronger future for themselves, their family and their society. A key step in building that future is changing the attitudes and practices that prevent women from achieving economic, social, political and legal equality. Women's Programs is working with the women of this province to help bring about these changes. Our role is to act as a catalyst for change by encouraging, coordinating and supporting changes through others.

We do this in two ways:

- We help other provincial government ministries to put in place programs, policies, and initiatives that are responsive to the needs of women throughout British Columbia;
- We help community groups to improve their services for women.

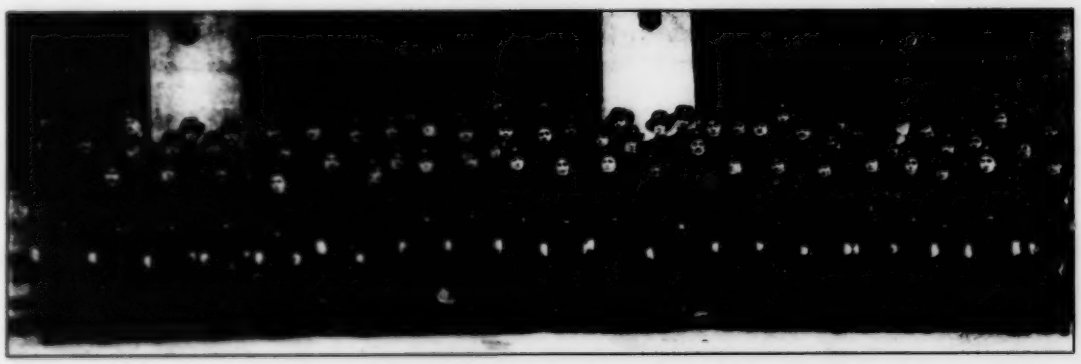
# Where We Started

The roots of British Columbia's Ministry of Women's Programs and Government Services and Minister Responsible for Families go back to 1966. In that year, the government of British Columbia established a Women's Bureau within the Department of Labour to research such areas as equal pay for equal work, maternity protection, and employment benefits.

Fourteen years later, in 1980, the cause of equality for women got another boost with the establishment of a Women's Office within the Employment Opportunity Programs Branch of the Ministry of Labour. In June 1982, Isabel Kelly was appointed Deputy Minister responsible for Women's Programs within the Ministry of Labour. The mandate of the Women's Office was broadened to include issues such as family violence, as well as employment and training for women.

The name of the office was changed to the Women's Secretariat in 1986/87 and responsibility for the Secretariat was transferred to the newly created Ministry of Advanced Education and Job Training.

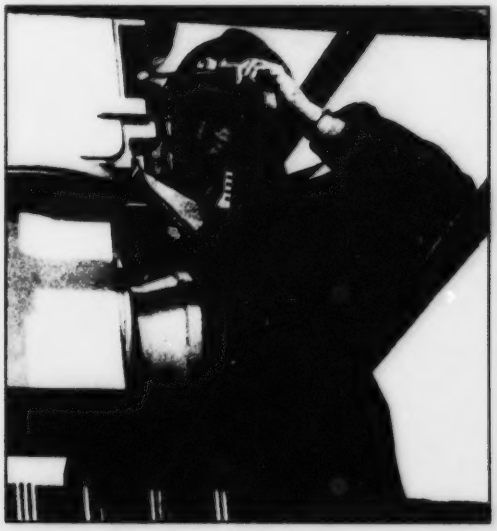
In 1989/90, responsibility for women's programs was transferred again to the Ministry of Government Services under the Honourable Carol Gran. In April, 1991, Ms. Gran was appointed Minister of Women's Programs and Government Services and Minister Responsible for Families to reflect the ministry's new focus and expanded responsibilities.



# How We Work

## Working Within Government

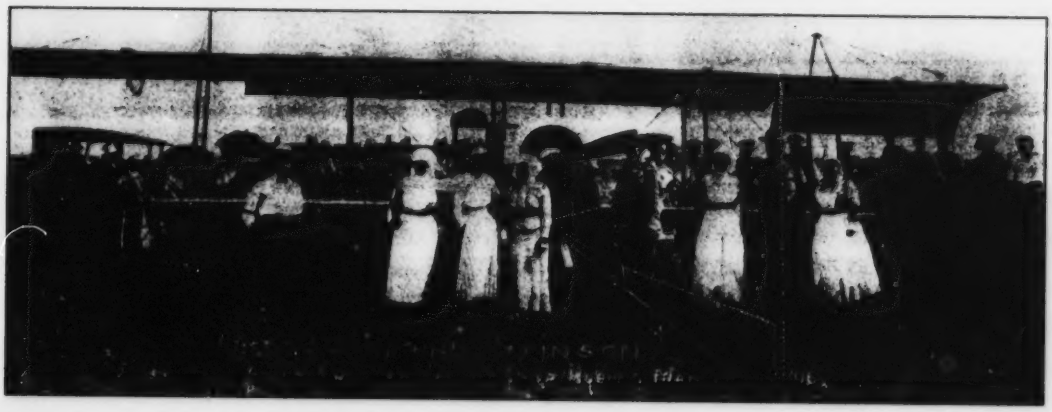
Many government ministries are responsible for programs and services that are important to women. Women's Programs helps to ensure that the needs of women are reflected in these policies, programs and services. Our staff regularly provides support to other ministries in the areas of research, policy development, and planning. In addition, the Minister of Women's Programs brings issues of concern to women to the attention of Cabinet for discussion and action.



## Working With Communities

Women's Programs is committed to involving the community in planning and delivering services for women and families. We do this in several ways.

- We consult with women in communities across the province on an ongoing basis.
- We assist communities to increase their involvement in the provision of services, to coordinate their services, and to expand their funding sources to more effectively meet the needs of women locally.
- We fund innovative community projects under our Women's Grants Program.



# Our Priorities

On April 3, 1990, Women's Programs set up an Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women made up of women from across British Columbia. The Council's mandate was to identify gaps in community programs for women and to recommend ways in which programs could be funded and delivered more effectively. The Council released its report on June 18, 1990.

The Advisory Council report, together with the input received during a province-wide consultation tour in spring 1990, helped us to identify the issues that concern the women of British Columbia the most. They are:

- child care
- family violence
- education and training for women
- workplace fairness
- pensions for homemakers

Women's Programs has made these issues priorities.

**"The motivation behind [our recommendations] was to create a different reality... a reality in which women's social, economic, and political contributions are encouraged and valued equally; and a reality in which women have an equal share in power and influence. These realities do not yet exist."**

*From the Report of the Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women, June 18, 1990.*

# 1990/91: A Year of Accomplishment

The past year has been one of accomplishment for Women's Programs. The ministry made important strides towards achieving many of its objectives. The following are some of the highlights:

Objective – *to move forward on implementing the recommendations of the report of the Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women.*

Action – Women's Programs established a standing Minister's Advisory Council on Services to Women in British Columbia, in January, 1991, to give advice on implementing the recommendations of the report of the Advisory Council on Community-Based Programs for Women.

Action – The ministry introduced initiatives in a number of areas identified as priorities in the report, including child care, family violence, education and training, and equality in the workplace.

**"Providing quality child care will bring both social and economic benefits to all British Columbians. Most of all, the provision of a continuum of quality child care options will demonstrate, through action, our commitment to caring for our children, our most valuable resource."**

*From Showing We Care: A Child Care Strategy for the 90's, the report of the Task Force on Child Care, January, 1991.*

Objective – *to increase the availability of affordable, quality child care programs throughout the province.*

Action – On July 5, 1990, Women's Programs formed a Task Force on Child Care to recommend ways of increasing the number of affordable, accessible, quality child care spaces in British Columbia. The Task Force released its report in January, 1991. In response to that report, Women's Programs announced $55.3 million in new funding over three years for child care spaces in the province. An inter-ministry Child Care Team was established to oversee and speed up the expansion of child care programs across the province. Its responsibilities include:

- developing an effective database on child care in British Columbia and keeping it up to date;
- determining the number of child care spaces required in the short and long term;
- assessing the effectiveness of existing programs and finding ways of streamlining the child care licensing process, and improving access to quality care;
- coordinating child care policy and programs across ministries;
- developing and putting in place new policies to expand child care.

**In Canada, today, at least one in eight women is assaulted by her husband or partner, and one in four women will be sexually assaulted, half of these assaults involving girls under the age of 17. In more than 62 per cent of female homicides in 1988, the victims died as a result of domestic violence.**

*From Ontario Women's Directorate Year-End Report 1989-90.*

Objective – *To identify ways of reducing violence against women.*

Action – On March 8, 1991 Women's Programs established the Task Force on Family Violence. Its purpose is to recommend ways to reduce violence against women, children and the elderly and to improve government policies, programs and services for victims of family violence. The task force is scheduled to present its recommendations in early 1992.

Action – In cooperation with other ministries, the Communications and Special Projects area of Women's Programs coordinated a public awareness television, radio and print ad campaign aimed at raising awareness that spousal assault is a crime. In addition, the ministry awarded $150,000 in grants to community organizations for public education in their communities.

**Objective** – *to increase community involvement in the delivery of women's services across British Columbia.*

**Action** – Women's Programs established a Community Initiatives Program in January, 1991. Under this program, a network of six regional coordinators is now in place across the province to assist communities to assess their local needs and improve their services for women. The coordinators are located in Duncan, New Westminster, Nelson, Prince George, Vernon, and Smithers. Between January and June of this year, the regional coordinators worked with individuals and groups in 100 communities as well as with many Indian bands.

**Action** – In March, 1991, Women's Programs approved 28 community initiatives grants totalling $235,000 under the Women's Grants Program. The grants went to assist local organizations to plan, develop and test programs that fit the needs of women in their communities. Additional grants were approved in June, 1991.

*Objective* – *to increase access for women to education and training.*

*Action* – In 1990-91 Women's Programs awarded over $430,000 for innovative education and training projects for women throughout the province under the Women's Grants Program. These include:

- "Women Do Math" conference at Simon Fraser University;
- "Careers In Science" video developed by the Society of Canadian Women in Science and Technology;
- Bridges Employment Training Projects by the Community Council of Victoria;
- "Girls in Science" workshops sponsored by the University Women's Club of Parksville and Qualicum Beach;
- Supervisory Training for Women in Non-Traditional Occupations;
- Job Readiness and Computer Literacy for Immigrant Women.

**Women in British Columbia earn an average of 63.6 cents for every dollar earned by a man.**

*Objective* – *to move toward greater equality in the workplace for women.*

*Action* – On September 11, 1990, the Minister of Women's Programs, and the Finance Minister announced a $40 million Pay Equity program (Workplace Fairness) for B.C. government employees. The aim of the program is to ensure that pay for female-dominated jobs is the same as pay for male-dominated jobs when the work is of equal value. The Pay Equity program, which will benefit 13,000 employees, is an important first step towards helping to reduce the wage gap between women and men employees within government.

*Action* – In December, 1990, the government of British Columbia launched an Employment Equity initiative for the British Columbia public service. The goal of this initiative is to attract and retain a qualified workforce that reflects the diversity of the population of British Columbia. Four groups have been recognized as being either under-represented in the workforce or disproportionately represented in lower level jobs: women, aboriginal people, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities. Employment Equity will address the barriers that have faced these groups and ensure fair opportunities for jobs and promotions within the public service. A central Employment Equity Group has been established to help ministries develop plans to achieve these goals.

Objective - *to introduce retirement protection for homemakers and other women without pension plans.*

Action - In March, 1991, Women's Programs Minister introduced new legislation called the British Columbia Retirement Savings Plan Act as an exposure bill. This legislation provides for the establishment of a voluntary retirement savings plan that will be available to all B.C. residents aged 18 to 65. Under this plan, participating low-income parents at home with their children will be eligible for an annual subsidy allowance of up to $500 as contribution assistance. To ensure all British Columbians have an opportunity to comment on the proposed act, the Ministry has sent information about the plan to all households in the province. Interested members of the public have been asked to respond to government by September 30, 1991.

Objective – *to promote the economic and social development of women in all areas of the province.*

Action – In 1990-91 Women's Programs provided a total of more than $1 million in grants to community groups to develop innovative, short-term projects that promote the equal participation of women in the social and economic life of the province. The Women's Grants Program gives priority to projects in the areas of workplace equality, family violence, education and training and community initiatives.

**"The opportunity to achieve economic independence is fundamental to the women of this province. Women must have equal access to all career opportunities, and the ability to remain financially independent after retirement."**

*From Moving Forward, January, 1991*

**"Government will... work in partnership with community organizations, private institutions and individual women to bring about changes in attitude, remove barriers and deliver effective, meaningful programs to support the advancement of women. I firmly believe that the initiatives we are undertaking will have far-reaching impact for the women of B.C."**

*From Moving Forward, January, 1991.*

# The Challenge Ahead: 1991/92 and Beyond

The challenge for Women's Programs in 1991/92 is to continue building on the progress we have made in the areas identified as priorities by the women of British Columbia.

The following are some of our objectives for 1991/92 and beyond:

- To involve communities in planning and delivering services for women.
- To increase government responsiveness to women through coordinated planning and effective service partnerships with other ministries.
- To increase the availability of accessible, affordable, quality child care in British Columbia.
- To increase public awareness that violence against women is a crime and increase responsiveness to the needs of victims and their families.
- To broaden the range of education, training and career opportunities available to girls and women.
- To assist in the development of pay equity initiatives, employment equity programs and other measures which promote equal opportunity in the British Columbia government.
- To increase access to pension coverage for women, including low-income women and homemakers.
- To ensure that the position of women is considered on all provincial government policy decisions, program initiatives, and federal/provincial agreements.

Through their courage and their vision, the women of British Columbia have made significant strides towards reaching many of their goals. But it is clear there is much left to do. Women's Programs is committed to helping women to create a new and better future – a future in which women can participate as full and equal partners.

Award of Recognition Luncheon, April 1991